

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 HA-05 /090 W
-----017410 171334Z /53

R 160940Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7412
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
US MISSION USUN NEW YORK 345
ZEN AMCONSUL DURBAN

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

DEPT LEASE PASS AFL-CIO

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: PLAB, SF, SHUM
SUBJECT: SIKHikhane PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

REF: A) JOHANNESBURG 0675; B) JOHANNESBURG A- 16

1. SUMMARY: URBAN TRAINING PROJECT DIRECTOR SIKHikhane IS CONCERNED THAT IN VIEW OF THE PERSISTENCE OF ATTITUDES UN-FAVORABLE TO BLACK TRADE UNIONS, THE PROSPECTS FOR MENAINGFUL CHANGE IN LABOR RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA ARE NOT GOOD.
END SUMMARY.

2. HEADLINE STORY IN MARCH 16 EXTRA EDITION OF RAND DAILY MAIL DEALS WITH REFUSAL OF DEPARTMENT OF LABOR OFFICIALS IN PRETORIA TO ACT ON ALLEGATIONS OF VICTIMIZATION OF BLACK WORKERS LODGED BY BLACK TRADE UNION OFFICIALS BECAUSE IT
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IS "OFFICIAL POLICY" NOT TO DEAL WITH BLACK UNIONS. LEONARD "SKAKES" SIKHikhane, DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN TRAINING PROJECT AND GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND ALLIED WORKERS UNIONS, IS QUOTED AS SAYING THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR'S ATTITUDE HAS MADE HIM LOSE HOPE FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN LABOR RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA. " UNDER THE PRESENT DISPENSATIONS, BLACK UNIONS JUST DO NOT STAND A CHANCE."

3. SIKHikhane and Frank Mohlala, national organizer of BCAWU, turned to the Rand Daily Mail after DOL officials refused last week to discuss a case involving union members who were demoted following attempts to set up a works committee and a strike last January at a Pretoria brickworks. Management of the company, which is regarded in trade circles as Verkrampt and inclined toward the right-wing Herstige National Party, also would not talk with BCAWU officials. A letter to the DOL has remained unanswered since January.

4. SIKHikhane said "How can the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry into labor law get around this type of attitude which reflects the policy of the government?" He added, "They can't ignore our existence. Even if they don't want to deal with the union, they should investigate the alleged infringements."

5. COMMENT: RELIANCE ON THE PRESS IS ONE OF THE FEW MEANS OPEN TO BLACK TRADE UNION LEADERS IN SUCH CASES WHERE MANAGEMENT AND THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR CHOOSE TO IGNORE THEM. IT IS THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE TO RESORT TO THE CIVIL COURTS, BUT THE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS ARE NOT GOOD (JOHANNESBURG A-16) AND THE PROCESS IS EXPENSIVE. UTP HAS ALREADY HAD TO PAY 3,000 RAND IN BAIL FOR UNION MEMBERS WHO WERE ARRESTED DURING THE JANUARY STRIKE. WHILE THERE IS GROWING RECOGNITION AMONG LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESPONSIBLE WHITE TRADE UNIONS SUCH AS THE RAILWAY ARTISAM STAFF ASSOCIATION THAT ALL WORKERS SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO BELONG TO REGISTERED TRADE UNIONS, THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNING NATIONAL PARTY TOWARD MORE INTRANSIGENT PRESSURES FROM BUSINESS, LABOR AND POLITICAL SOURCES WILL BE IMPORTANT IN DETERMINING WHETHER WIEHAHN'S COMMISSION IS, IN FACT, ABLE TO BRING ABOUT MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S SYSTEM OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: UNION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, LABOR UNIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 mar 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978JOHANN00691
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780119-0318
Format: TEL
From: JOHANNESBURG
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780361/aaaabzol.tel
Line Count: 103
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 35224bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 JOHANNESBURG 675, 78 JOHANNESBURG A-16
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3312342
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SIKHIKHANE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE
TAGS: ELAB, SHUM, SF, (SIKHIKHANE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/35224bc6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014